

**NEVER JUDGE A
BOOK
BY ITS COVER,**

AND OTHER IMPORTANT

LESSONS ABOUT

ASTHMA FOR

ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANTS

SINCE YOU'RE

ALREADY **JUGGLING** SO MANY

THINGS, WHY NOT MANAGE A LITTLE

HEALTH?



Despite the fact that you sit at the center of the school, managing each student's health is not an attractive responsibility. In fact, it's probably not even supposed to be your responsibility. That said, school absences due to asthma have risen to about 14 million days in the U.S. While this country figures out how to improve schools, somebody's got to know how to manage and respond to asthma. Do you?

ASTHMA
it's more serious than you think.

OUR PROMISE TO YOU

Dear Administrative Assistant:

This is yet another health information kit to cross your path, but don't judge it too quickly. Unlike many other kits, this one was derived from surveys and interviews of hundreds of Michigan school employees like you. As a result, we know you don't need or want big binders of superfluous information. That's why this short book contains only the most vital information necessary for you to respond effectively to asthma and to improve the quality of life in your school. Take a few minutes to read through this handbook (approximately 10 minutes). Complete your asthma checklist. If you know a student has asthma, refer to the student's file for an asthma action plan. If there is not a current one on file, encourage the student's parent/guardian to follow up with their physician for an individualized plan, and keep a copy at the school for reference. We promise you'll breathe easier about the status of asthma care in your school. After all, everyone has the right to breathe easy.

- Asthma Initiative of Michigan

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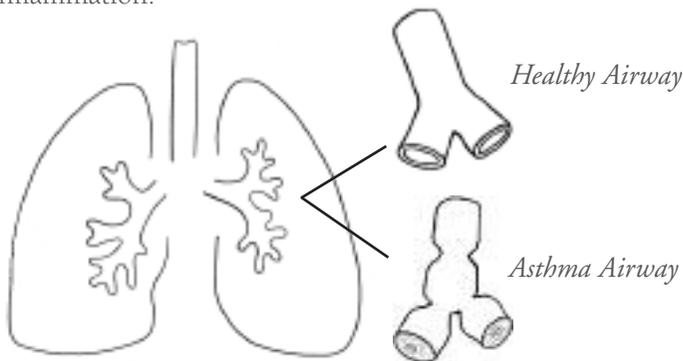
WHAT'S YOUR ASTHMA IQ?

“Asthma is not serious enough for me to become concerned about it.”

True or False

FALSE: *Children can and have died from asthma episodes suffered in school. One school was sued for \$9 million for an unnecessary student death due to asthma. But thousands of children suffer less severely every day in school.*

THE DISEASE - Here's the nitty-gritty. Asthma is a chronic inflammatory lung disease that causes the airway lining to become inflamed and swollen, blocking airflow (see diagram below). Mucus production and muscle spasm further block airflow. These complications cause asthma symptoms. Symptoms include coughing, wheezing, and breathing difficulty. These symptoms range in seriousness from bothersome to life threatening. Over time asthma can result in permanent tissue damage and chronic airway inflammation.



Worse still, no known cure for asthma exists. Asthma symptoms, however, can be managed. In fact, long-term control medicines, preventive use of quick-relief medications (e.g., inhalers and nebulizers), and reducing asthma triggers can prevent symptoms from ever developing and reduce the chances of life-threatening symptoms. Without you, however, effective asthma management is not possible.

IT'S DIFFICULT TO LEARN **UNDER**



CONDITIONS LIKE THIS.

Not being able to breathe is really awful.

But not being able to breathe well isn't much better.

Surprisingly, too many triggers abound in Michigan classrooms that make breathing for some as hard as algebra.

How many kids in your school feel like this?



WHY CARE - *You should care because*

nationally asthma is one of the most common chronic diseases in children and the leading cause of school absenteeism due to chronic illness. In 2001, 14 million school absences were due to asthma. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics Committee on School Health, many parents keep their kids home because they fear school employees cannot properly manage or respond to a student with asthma. Overall, nearly 5 million children under the age of 18 have been diagnosed with asthma, and a great deal more remain undiagnosed. To make matters worse, asthma rates have nearly quadrupled in the last 15 years.

WHAT'S YOUR ASTHMA IQ?

“Managing asthma will take too much time and effort to be worthwhile.”

True or False

FALSE: *With this book, managing asthma should be simple. Here's all you really need to know:*

- 1) how to respond to an asthma emergency,*
- 2) the new laws about inhaler use,*
- 3) what triggers are common in schools, and*
- 4) how to track and manage asthma.*

You should care because students with asthma can die. But even those who do not suffer life-threatening symptoms risk devastating consequences associated with difficulty breathing. Students with poorly controlled asthma often feel tired, fearful, distracted, or unable to think. Many simply miss school because their parents aren't confident that the school is a safe place for a child with asthma. We know asthma may seem like a minor problem. But don't be fooled. Asthma is a pervasive disease that has a significant impact on youth in your school.

You should care because you can make a significant difference in the lives of a large group of students. Though serious, asthma poses little threat when managed effectively. The difference in schools is simple... you. You are such an important care-giver in the school. In many cases, you are the first line of defense. Maybe this shouldn't be your responsibility, but because it is, we want you to be prepared. Simply keep reading this book, complete your checklist (see page 17), post the magnet in your office, and refer to the student's file for an asthma action plan. If there is not a current one on file, encourage the student's parent/guardian to follow up with their physician for an individualized plan, and keep a copy at the school for reference.

CAN I **GET** A LITTLE **RESPECT**

AROUND HERE?



Asthma may easily be the Rodney Dangerfield of diseases. Many students with asthma are not identified or tracked during the school year.

To make matters worse, school environments are not checked routinely for asthma triggers. The disease is too serious to disrespect it. Efforts to maintain an asthma safe school won't go unnoticed by students.

Do you know how to maintain an asthma safe school?



WHAT'S YOUR ASTHMA IQ?

“Cold weather alone can trigger asthma symptoms.”

True or False

TRUE: Studies demonstrate that cold air causes symptoms in most children with asthma. Extra caution should be used to manage children's asthma when they are outside in the cold. Make sure to read your students' asthma action plans so you know how to deal with each child if weather is a trigger.

ASTHMA TRIGGERS - Many of us have a limited knowledge of asthma triggers. Below are some of the known common causes of asthma symptoms (unranked). As you read, take note of how many triggers are common in your own office and other areas in the school.

- Weather
 - Exposure to cold air
 - Sudden temperature change
- Vigorous exercise
- Emotional stress
- Infections
 - Common cold
 - Influenza
 - Respiratory infections
- Allergies
 - Furry/feathery animals (i.e., pets)
 - Pollen

- Feathers
- Molds
- Some foods
- House dust
- Dust mites
- Pesticides
- Dusts and Vapors from
 - Plastics
 - Grains
 - Metals
 - Wood
 - Solvents
- Air pollution
 - Perfumes
 - Cigarette smoke (even on clothing)
 - Ozone
 - Sulfur Dioxide
 - Auto exhaust
- Drugs
 - Aspirin
 - Ibuprofen
 - Some heart medications
- Others
 - New furnishings or equipment
 - Chalk
 - Dust
 - Strong odors (e.g., magic markers, perfumes, or glues)

Individual students may have additional triggers not on this list—another good reason to have an asthma action plan handy.

IT MAY **LOOK** LIKE AN ASTHMA

INHALER BUT IT'S ACTUALLY A SUPER-AMAZING-

POTENTIALLY-LIFE-SAVING-BREATHING-

MACHINE.



A recent Michigan law allows all children, with doctor and parental permission, to carry their own inhalers (and a collective sigh fell over Michigan). To students with asthma, this law can quite literally be a breath of fresh air. Sadly, one student died on the way to the office to get his inhaler. Does everyone in your school who needs an inhaler have one?



ASTHMA SYMPTOMS - Triggers cause

symptoms, but people react to asthma in different ways.

Below is a list of asthma symptoms. Each symptom varies in seriousness from minor exacerbations to asthma emergencies.

Most of us cannot grade the seriousness of a given symptom by its appearance. If you encounter a student with asthma, you must RESPOND TO ALL SYMPTOMS IMMEDIATELY.

Remember that this list is here for your future reference.

- Changes in breathing
 - Increased or persistent coughing
 - Wheezing
 - Breathing through the mouth
 - Shortness of breath
 - Rapid breathing
 - Difficulty breathing

- Other signs
 - Itchy chin or neck
 - “Clipped” speech (short, choppy sentences)
 - Difficulty walking
 - Fearful behavior
 - Nostrils flare when breathing
 - Fatigue
 - Agitation
 - Increased pulse rate

Allergy symptoms
Blue lips or fingertips
Sucking in of skin around chest/neck

- Verbal Complaints
 - “My chest is tight.”
 - “My chest hurts.”
 - “My neck feels funny.”
 - “My mouth is dry.”
 - “I don’t feel well.”
 - “I can’t catch my breath.”

REMEMBER, seemingly minor symptoms can have devastating effects. Plus, minor symptoms can quickly become life threatening. That’s just how asthma works. Therefore, don’t ignore the seriousness of an apparently minor symptom, like persistent coughing. Regular coughing requires a quick response, which is outlined for you next.

WHAT’S YOUR ASTHMA IQ?

“Kids with asthma are generally in worse physical shape and lazier than kids without asthma.”

True or False

FALSE: *Asthma is not related to laziness. In fact, many Olympic athletes have asthma. The only difference between the student who can’t participate in gym class and the Olympic athlete is that the athlete manages asthma with proper medications. The student might not even be aware that he/she has asthma, let alone have the proper medications.*

I NEED EIGHT UNITS OF

FOCUSED ATTENTION,



STAT!

Asthma is in desperate need of medical attention in schools. The disease can be just as severe as a heart attack, stroke, or ruptured appendix.

Worse, the disease is far more common among children than any of those ailments. When their symptoms appear, do you know how to treat your students' asthma?



ONE SCHOOL **COUGHED-UP**
\$9 MILLION FOR FAILING TO

RESPOND
TO ASTHMA.



Getting harder to breathe? Don't be fooled by how insignificant asthma seems. One California school was sued to the tune of \$9 million for its negligent response to asthma. Asthma is the most common chronic disease in Michigan schools, and its effects are often underestimated or ignored. The American Lung Association has found that asthma lurks undetected in many Michigan schools.

Can you afford \$9 million?

ASTHMA
it's more serious than you think.

ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT CHECKLIST

- We have reduced the following checklist down to the essentials. These are basic issues you must address if you wish to respond effectively to asthma. If you cannot respond “yes” to each of the following items, you are not addressing the bare necessities.

- | | NO | YES |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Do you know where to find each student’s asthma action plan? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. Do you understand how to use the asthma action plan? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. Do you know how to administer asthma medications? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. Do you know how to identify and respond to students with asthma symptoms? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. Have you attached the quick reference guide magnet in your office? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6. Do you have a protocol for identifying and getting asthma action plans from new students? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

QUICK, WHICH CHILD IS HAVING AN ASTHMA **ATTACK?**



Asthma is kind of a quirky disease. On one hand, the symptoms seem so trivial they often go unnoticed. On the other hand, these same symptoms can and have led to death. It is a disease that has to be managed, especially in school.

Do you have a plan for managing asthma in your school?



ASTHMA ACTION PLAN - We've

mentioned the asthma action plan repeatedly. Wondering what it is? Well, we've included an asthma action plan in your folder. If you know a student has asthma, refer to the student's file for an asthma action plan. If there is not a current one on file, encourage the student's parent/guardian to follow up with their physician for an individualized plan, and keep a copy at the school for reference.

WHAT'S YOUR ASTHMA IQ?

“Children often grow out of asthma.”

True or False

FALSE: *Once you have asthma you always have it. Some children show no symptoms in their teen years. Others do. Symptoms can reappear at any age. If you wait for children to “grow out” of asthma rather than learn how to cope with and manage the disease, you put their child's health and psychosocial development at serious risk.*

Perhaps the worst failure in responding to asthma is to not have an action plan ready for each student who needs one. If you notice a student exhibiting one or more of the asthma symptoms, locate the action plan before responding. If one does not exist, address the symptoms immediately.

IF YOU DON'T THINK **NOT** BEING

ABLE TO **BREATHE**



IS BAD, TRY IT SOMETIME.

To get a better idea, try breathing through a straw— it's even worse than the double negative you just read. Sadly, each school day children sit in classrooms filled with things that trigger attacks. Dust, molds, furry class pets, even perfume can all cause asthma symptoms. Worse still, a recent survey found that many school workers don't think asthma is really that serious. At the same time, triggers abound. Do you know what they are?



RESOURCE LIST - We hope you found this manual useful. At the same time, it was never intended to be an exhaustive resource. Should you need or want more information about the disease, we've provided a list (below) of organizations and web sites that can provide you with comprehensive information, further tools and resources, speakers for staff training, etc.

1. Michigan Resources

a. **Asthma Initiative of Michigan:**

1-866-EZLUNGS (395-8647), www.getastmahelp.org

b. **Michigan Asthma Coalitions:**

<http://getastmahelp.org/UserCoalitionList.asp>

c. **Michigan Association of School Nurses:**

734-992-2223, <http://www.michiganschoolnurses.org/>

d. **National Jewish Medical Research Center**

(Lung line): 1-800-222-5864, www.njc.org

2. National Resources

a. **Allergy and Asthma Network/Mothers of**

Asthmatics, Inc.: 1-800-878-4403, www.aanma.org

• Breatherville USA,

<http://www.aanma.org/breatherville.htm>

b. **American Academy of Allergy, Asthma, and**

Immunology: 1-800-822-2762, www.aaaai.org

c. **Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America:**

1-877-2-ASTHMA, www.asthmaandallergies.org

- d. **American College of Allergy, Asthma, and Immunology:** 1-800-842-7777, www.allergy.mcg.edu
 - e. **American Lung Association:** 1-800-LUNG USA, www.lungusa.org
 - School Programs
 - Open Airways for Schools
 - f. **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:**
 - **National Center for Environmental Health:**
<http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/airpollution/default.htm>
 - **Strategies for Addressing Asthma with a Coordinated School Health Program:**
http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dash/00_pdf/asthma.pdf
 - g. **NHLBI Health Information Center:**
<http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/lung/index.htm>
 - h. **U.S. Environmental Protection Agency:**
1-800-438-4318
 - Indoor Air Quality Information Clearinghouse,
www.epa.gov/iaq/schools/tfs/guideh.html
 - Integrated Pest Management for Schools,
<http://www.epa.gov/pesticides/ipm/schoolipm/index.html>
3. **National Education Association Health Information Network, Asthma and Schools website:**
www.asthmaandschools.org

**THE END,
BUT DON'T STOP NOW!**

“YOU MUST ACT.”

True or False

***TRUE:** It takes some effort, but you must respond to the threat of asthma. Use your checklist as a guide to what you need to do next. To answer any questions, and to schedule a (dreaded) in-service, just contact us. We'd love to help you respond to asthma in the best ways possible.*



For more information, more books,
or just more help with asthma, call the
American Lung Association of Michigan at
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